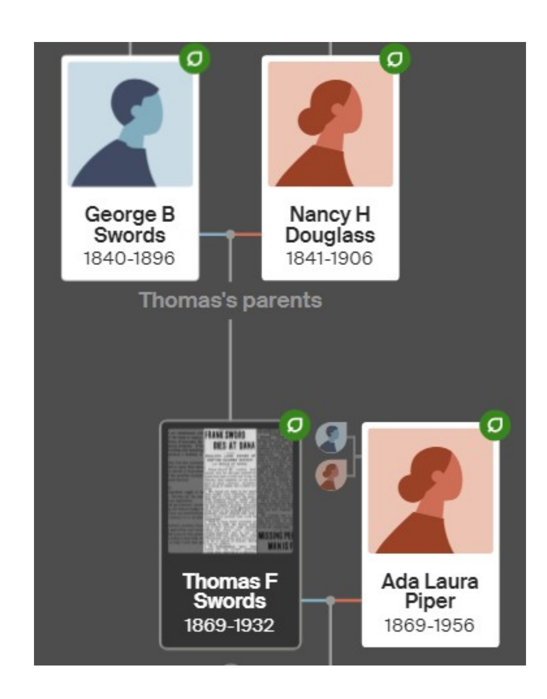
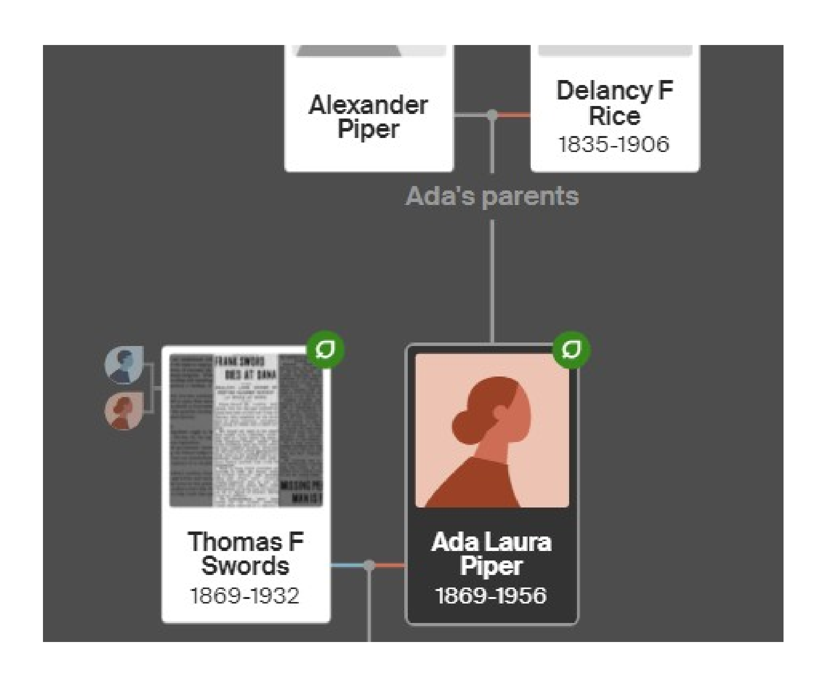
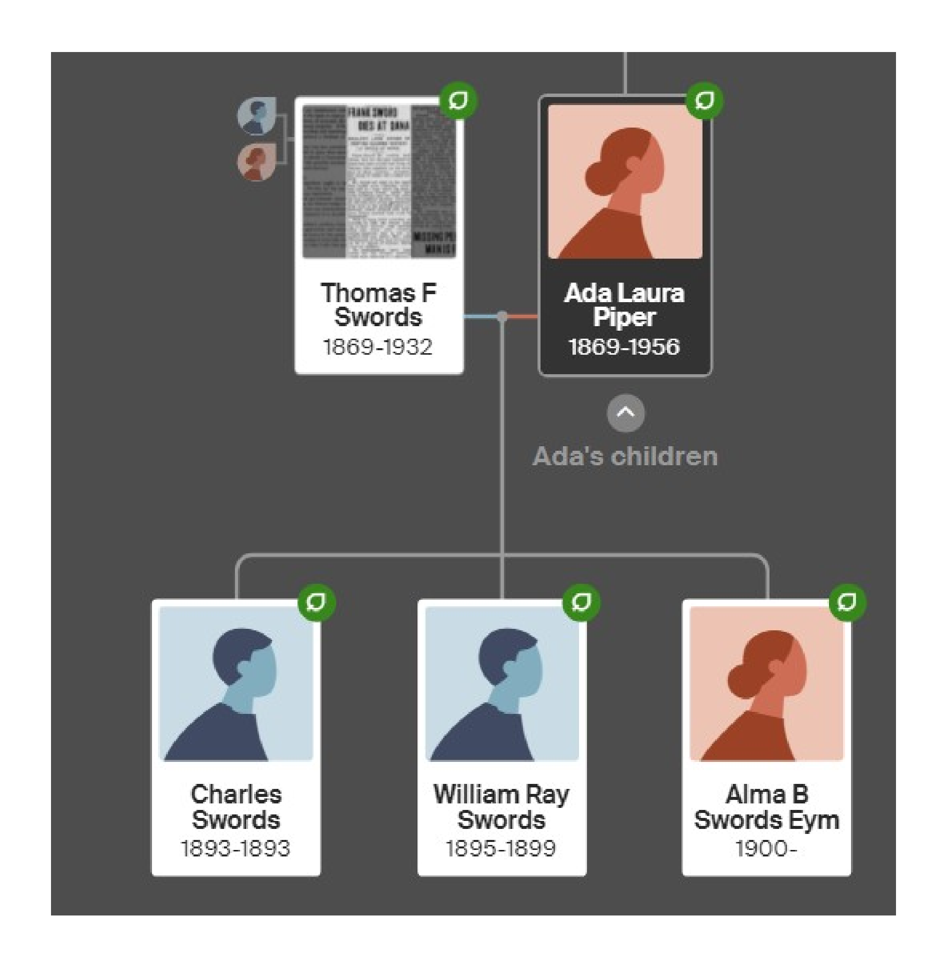
Research on Ada Swords Who Helped Establish Evenglow Lodge in Pontiac, Illinois

Family Trees from Ancestry.Com









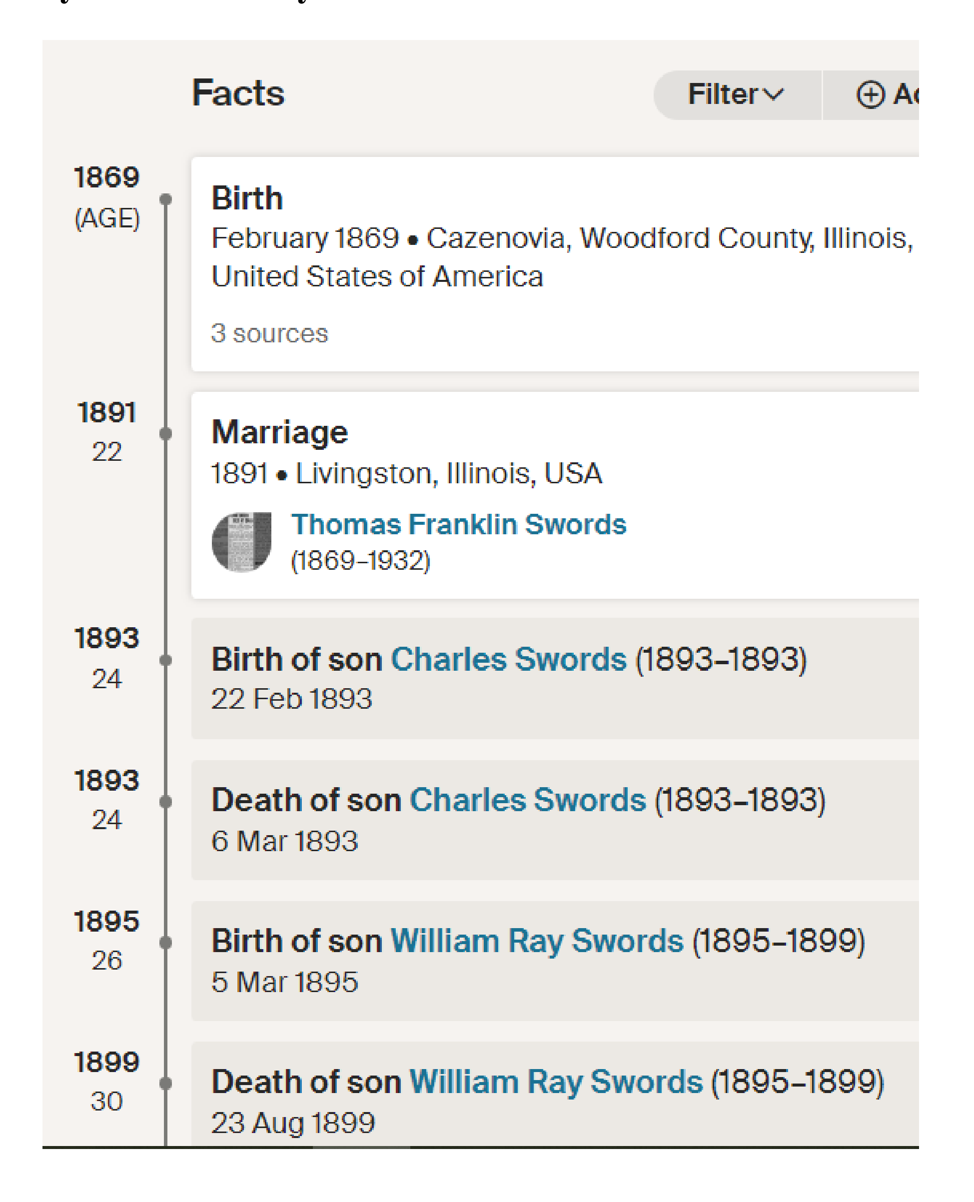
Ada Laura Piper

B: February 1869 Cazenovia, Woodford County, Illinois, United States of America

D: 1956 Pontiac, Livingston, Illinois, USA

Ada's obituary says she had three children that died in infancy. I think Alma was adopted or lived with Ada, and Ada was not her birth mother. It would take more research to verify this.

Ada's Life Story from Ancestry.com



1900
31

Birth of daughter Alma B Swords Eyman (1900–)
abt 1900 • Illinois

1906
37

Death of mother Delancy F Rice (1835–1906)
11 Oct 1906 • Woodford, Illinois, USA

1930
61

Residence
1930 • Pontiac, Livingston, Illinois, USA

Marital Status: Married; Relation to Head: Wife

1 source

1932
63

Death of husband Thomas Franklin Swords (1869–1932)
11 Apr 1932 • Pontiac, Livingston County, Illinois, United States of America

1935
66

Residence
1935 • Pontiac, Livingston, Illinois

1 source

1940
71

Residence
1940 • Pontiac, Livingston, Illinois, USA

Marital Status: Widowed; Relation to Head: Head

1950
81

Residence
1950 • Pontiac, Livingston, Illinois, USA

Relation to Head: Head; Marital Status: Widowed

1 source

1956
87

Death
1956 • Pontiac, Livingston, Illinois, USA

April 7, 1956, Pantagragh
Obit for Ada Swords

Mrs. Ada Swords

PONTIAC —(PNS)— Mrs. Ada Laura Swords, 87, died at 3:15 p. m. Friday at the McDonald Nursing Home. She had been in failing health three years.

She was taken to the Raleigh J. Harris Funeral Home. Funeral arrangements are incomplete.

She was born Feb. 8, 1869, in Amity Township, a daughter of Alexander and Delancy Rice Piper. She was married to Frank Swords in 1891 in Amity Township. They retired from farming in 1922 and moved to Pontiac. He died in 1932.

Surviving are a brother, Charles Piper of Peoria and a sister-in-law, Mrs. Minnie Swords of Pontiac. She was preceded in death by three children in infancy.

She was a member of the Methodist Church.

April 8, 1956
Pantagraph

Mrs. Ada Swords

PONTIAC — (PNS) — The funeral for Mrs. Ada Laura Swords, 87, who died Friday, will be at 2 p. m. Monday at the Raleigh J. Harris Funeral Home with Dr. Clifford C. Brown officiating. Burial will be in Center Cemetery in Flanagan.

May 11, 1957
Pantagraph



Pontiac—The Illinois Hotel, originally built in 1905 as a hospital, will become Evenglow Lodge, where aged persons can reside at reasonable rates. The building was purchased for $49,000 of an estate left by Ada Swords for "the establishment and maintenance of an old people's home at or near the city of Pontiac." PANTAGRAPH PHOTO

Swords Estate Financing Dream of Home for Aged

Illinois Hotel Will Become Evenglow Lodge

the residence retired as funds are available later.

The Swords estate made purchase of the Illinois Hotel possible. It cost $49,000, including all hotel equipment, furnishings and linens and also an adjacent lot. The

immediately formed ar
tion of building im
will get underway.

DRAWING BLUE

The Pontiac contract
Jean A. McCoy and Sc

Illinois Hotel Will Become Evenglow Lodge

PONTIAC — Purchase of the Illinois Hotel, one block from the courthouse square in Pontiac, and a plan to seek sponsorship of the Illinois Conference of the Methodist Church brings to action stage a movement begun three years ago to establish a lodge in Pontiac for aged persons.

Three years ago, a small group of Pontiac civic leaders recognized a need for a well-located, properly equipped establishment that would provide comfortable, convenient and congenial housing for elderly persons able to support themselves but not physically able to fully care for themselves or else who desired to reside amid persons of their own age.

Leaders of the movement are Harry Vogelsinger Sr., president of the Pontiac National Bank; Myron Heins, president of the Bank of Pontiac; the Rev. A. B. Morrow, Presbyterian minister; Chester Crabtree, an attorney and clergyman, and Mrs. Cora B. Daughterty, an interested citizen.

FORMED CORPORATION

FORMED CORPORATION

They proceeded quietly to inquire into procedures for establishing such an institution. Their first step was to form a non-profit corporation, originally called Sunset Lodge, Inc. It was recently renamed Evenglow Lodge, Inc., because there is a home for the aged in Quincy with the Sunset name.

Among others offering assistance was L. I. Harris, trustee of the estate of the late Ada Swords, who died in 1956, leaving a farm, a Pontiac residence and cash totaling approximately $160,000.

The $149,000 put into the trust of Mr. Harris was designated to be used for "a charitable institution, the purpose of which shall be the establishment and maintenance of an old people's home at or near the city of Pontiac."

ROOM TO EXPAND

There is a mortgage on the South side residence which could be paid off, according to Mr. Vogelsinger, but, instead, the cash of the estate and income from the farm will be channeled into the lodge and the mortgage on

the residence retired as funds are available later.

The Swords estate made purchase of the Illinois Hotel possible. It cost $49,000, including all hotel equipment, furnishings and linens and also an adjacent lot. The hotel, which can accommodate 40 persons, covers only 40 feet of the 120 foot width of the two lots, so there is space for expansion.

BUILT FOR HOSPITAL

Mr. Vogelsinger took option on the hotel a year ago, shortly after it was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Katz of Pekin from Mrs. Robert Grogan. Mr. and Mrs. Grogan operated the hotel for 34 years.

The building was originally constructed in 1905 by Dr. J. A. Colburne as the Minerva hospital and thus is especially suitable for a home for the aged, notes Mr. Vogelsinger. Each room of the main and second floors is equipped with running water. Several rooms have private baths and additional baths will be installed.

State health, fire and welfare officials were invited to inspect the building, said Mr. Vogelsinger, and they found it to be suitable and safe with a few recommended changes, which will be made before the lodge is opened. It is the board's hope that it will be opened by fall.

by fall.

SEEK CONTINUITY

Although anxious to see the lodge established, explained Mr. Vogelsinger, the board is equally anxious "to have it backed by a continuing organization."

A year ago, he explained, the Methodist Church appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of backing the lodge and "they thought it had possibilities."

"We will offer the Illinois Conference of the Methodist Church the hotel for lodge use, the residence for a superintendent's home and over $60,000 in cash and hope that the conference, at its annual meeting in June, will give the proposition favorable consideration."

He added that if the conference does accept, the lodge will be operated on a non-profit basis by an inter-denominational board of from 18 to 20 members.

CHURCH HAS EXPERIENCE

The church now operates the Sunset Home in Quincy and also a hospital in Peoria, so the experience and understanding of such an operation would be a valuable asset.

Mr. Vogelsinger believes that a lodge of this type, offering good food and care and a congenial atmosphere at reasonable, non-profit rates, would be very attractive to widows and windowers, now living alone or with relatives, and to pensioners, whose income would be adequate for living comfortably at the lodge but perhaps insufficient for maintaining a private residence.

If the Illinois Conference of the Methodist Church does decide in June to undertake the responsibility of Evenglow Lodge, the inter-denominational board will be

immediately formed and construction of building improvements will get underway.

DRAWING BLUEPRINTS

The Pontiac contracting firm of Jean A. McCoy and Sons, is blueprinting proposed improvements.

Besides additional bathrooms, there would be an outside fire escape at the back of the building and an elevator on the east side of the building, so it could also serve a possible future adjacent building. Each floor will have a lounge area and a nursing station.

There would be a new lobby reception room, a new entrance and garden and landscaping on the southeast side of the building.

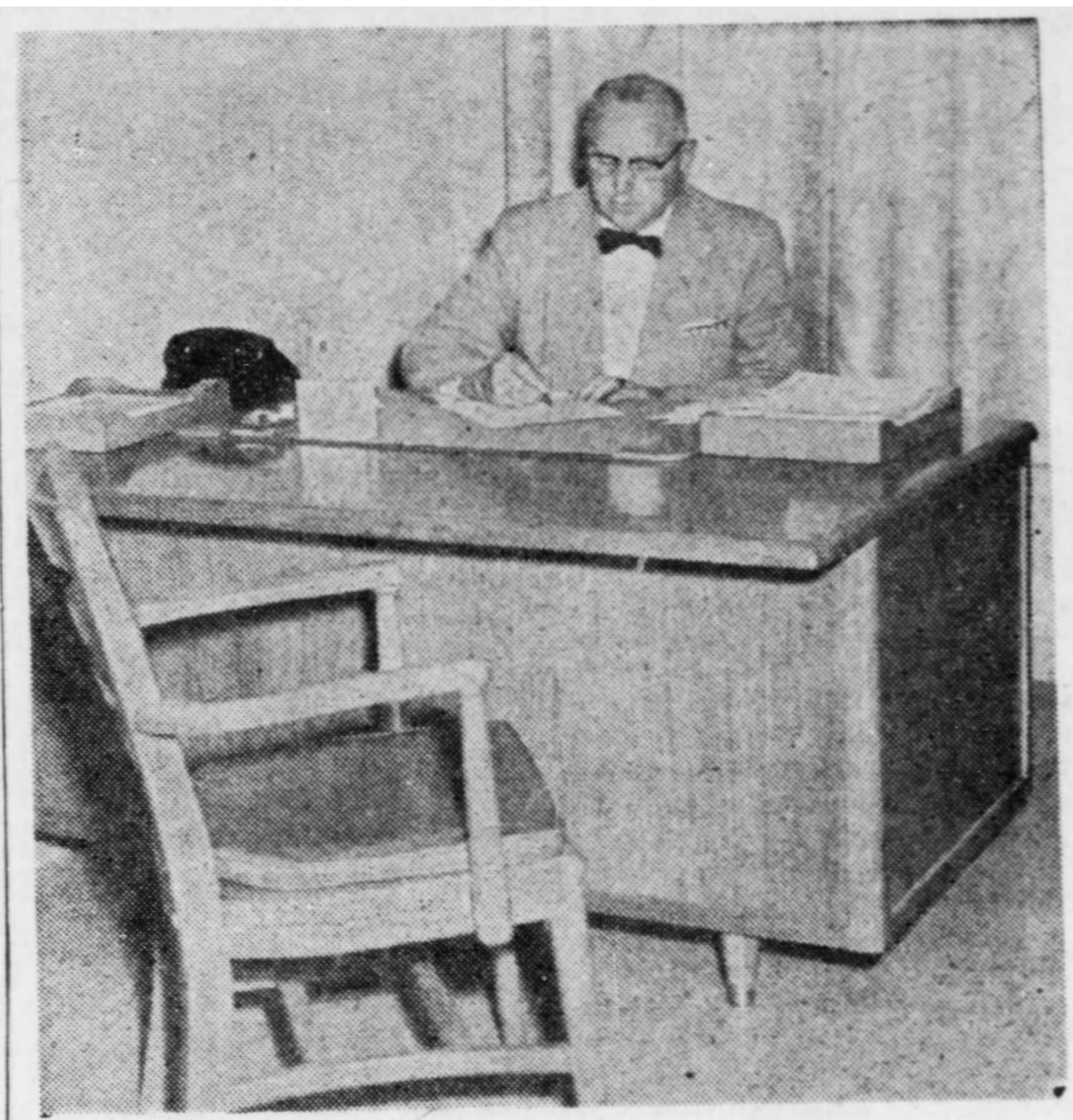
In the basement, which Mr. Vogelsinger noted remained dry during the recent flood, there will be a cafeteria, laundry, workshop and sewing rooms.

October 11, 1958
Pantagraph

OPEN HOUSE OCT. 26

Evenglow Lodge, Unique Home For Aged, Pontiac, To Open Nov. 7

By PEG SPALDING



The Rev. Lewis D. Hopper, superintendent at his desk, plans an Oct. 26 open house and a Nov. 6 annual meeting of the Illinois Conference of Boards of Hospitals and Homes, one day before the arrival of the lodge's first guest.



Three Pontiac trustees of Evenglow try out the lounge and maple furnishings for comfort and atmosphere. The Rev. Dale Pitcher, left, pastor of First Methodist church, is board president. Mrs. Le Roy Pike, center, selected much of the furniture. Harry E. Vogelsinger Sr., right, initiated the move that resulted in Evenglow Lodge.



Mrs. Jewel Campagna, supervisor of nurses, makes up a twin bed in one double room of the lodge. Each bedroom has a private wash basin that has a connecting bath and each is individually furnished. There are 23 bedrooms and a guest capacity of 37. Mrs. Campagna is one of three nurses who will be on 24 hour duty at Evenglow.—(Pantagraph Photos)

By PEG SPALDING
Pantagraph Reporter at Pontiac

PONTIAC —(PNS)— Evenglow Lodge, a $175,000 home for the aged with a resort hotel atmosphere and planned activities, will hold open house Saturday, Oct. 26, before guests take up residence there on Nov. 7.

Though non-denominational, it will be operated by the Board of Hospitals and Homes of the Illinois Conference of the Methodist Church, which will hold its annual meeting at the lodge on Nov. 6, one day before official opening of the new institution.

Evenglow, first of its kind in Central Illinois, will represent a $200,000 investment with completion of Evenglow House, a two-story frame dwelling now being remodeled at a cost of $25,000. It is east of the lodge and separated from the lodge by a vacant lot that will be landscaped next summer.

EXPECTED EXPANSION

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EXPECTED EXPANSION

Evenglow House, intended to provide additional sleeping rooms, may be annexed later to the three-story brick lodge, which has a sleeping capacity of 37 guests in 23 rooms on floors B and C.

The operational capacity of the lodge was purposely made adequate to handle three times as many guests as could be housed in the lodge because it was believed, when remodeling was begun, that there would be expansions, such as Evenglow House.

The dining room, on floor A, has space to seat over 100 persons but is equipped now for 54 persons. It runs on an ell arround an ultra modern kitchen completely equipped with stainless steel fixtures, including a dish-washer, disposal, stove, steam table, two sets of double sinks and a potato masher.

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Rev.

er.

PASTEL DECORATING

The kitchen, like all rooms of the lodge, is decorated in pastels. The walls are soft yellow, cabinets limed oak and Formica counter tops pink.

One end of the dining area is a lounge that can be converted to more dining area when needed. On floor A also is a recreation room with shuffleboard markings on the vinyl tile floor covering.

The entire building was rewired. Each room has accoustal ceilings and 220 volt outlets so guests may have individual air conditioning if they desire it. There is running water in each room also.

A $17,000 self-operating elevator, large enough to hold a bed, is located by a rear, east wall of the lodge so it can be used by any subsequent addition to the building.

"BETTER THAN BEST"

ing.

"BETTER THAN BEST"

William Diaz, Pontiac contractor, summarized, "Everything has been done better than the best standard set up by the Illinois Public Health Service."

Lewis D. Hopper, the former Methodist minister who is superintendent of Evenglow, clarified that Evenglow is intended to be more than merely sanitary and safe. It is intended to be a "happy" place.

Mrs. LeRoy Pike, who selected many of the furnishings and much of the drapery, echoed that sentiment with comment that furnishings are comfortable but modern and gay in appearance, with pastel coloring. "There is nothing drab," she pointed out.

SEVERAL LOUNGE AREAS

There are lounge areas on all three floors in addition to the recreation room on floor A and a

main lounge and solarium on floor B.

The main lounge is mahogany paneled and furnished in light brown hardrock maple. The carpeting is pink and the drapery and walls are soft green. The lounge was furnished with gifts from Mr. and Mrs. Robert Niven and from the Pontiac National Bank. The solarium, heated for year-round use, is the only room still unfurnished at the lodge.

Bedroom furnishings are mainly bleached mohagany or walnut and limed oak, with some rooms in antique maple. Colorscheming in most guest rooms is pink, yellow, soft green and beige.

TOOK OWN FURNITURE

One guest, Mrs. Alice Johnston of Lacon, has moved her own furnishings into the room she has selected to use after Nov. 7.

Three nurses will work shifts the clock around at the lodge. Mrs. Jewel Campagna of Pontiac is nurse supervisor.

Superintendent Hopper said no lodge rates will be publicly quoted because each guest is considered in an individual way.

He said rates vary with choice of rooms and requirements of guests but "compare favorably with costs of residency in other homes of the same high quality and pleasant surroundings."

SWORDS ESTATE

Evenglow Lodge was made possible through funds from the estate of the late Mrs. Ada Swords, who died in 1956, leaving an estate of $160,000, of which $149,000 was put into trust of L. I. Harris of Pontiac.

Mr. Harris was to select a "charitable institution, the purpose of which shall be the establishment and maintenance of an old people's home at or near the city of Pontiac. . ."

The Illinois Hotel at the corner of Chicago and Washington Streets, near several churches and the business district, was purchased for $49,000 by Evenglow Lodge, Inc.

The Methodist Church was asked to sponsor the home because Evenglow trustees felt there should be the backing of a "continuing organization."

The building was originally the Minerva Hospital, erected in 1905 by Dr. J. A. Colburne. For 34 years it was operated as the Illinois Hotel by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Grogan, who sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Katz of Pekin shortly before it was bought for conversion into Evenglow Lodge.

October 11, 1965
Pantagraph

PUBLIC AUCTION

Approximately 238 Acres of Farm Land situated in Amity Township, Livingston County, Illinois, formerly owned by the late ADA SWORDS.

Date and Hour:

Wednesday, October 13, 1965

at 1:30 o'clock P. M., CDST.

Where:
North door of courthouse in Pontiac, Livingston County, Illinois.

General Location of Farm Land:
Approximately 2 miles East and 4 miles North of Flanagan, Illinois.

Legal Description:

TRACT I—The South Half of the Northwest Quarter of Section 31, Township 29 North, Range 4 East of the Third Principal Meridian in Livingston County, Illinois.

TRACT II—The North Half of the Northwest Quarter of Section 31, Township 29 North, Range 4 East of the Third Principal Meridian in Livingston County, Illinois.

TRACT III—The North Half of the Northeast Quarter of Section 31, Township 29 North, Range 4 East of the Third Principal Meridian in Livingston County, Illinois, except the North 193 ft. of the East 399 ft. thereof.

Method of Offering Property for Sale:
The farm land will first be offered for sale in tracts as hereinabove set forth; thereafter in any combination or combinations less than the whole; lastly the three tracts as an entirety and whichever offer or series of offers produces the greater total price will be the one or ones accepted.

Terms of Sale:
The successful bidder or bidders will be required to enter into written contracts to purchase the real estate with 15% of the purchase price to be paid on the date of sale. The 1965 taxes will be paid by Seller, who reserves the 1965 crops. Possession of the premises shall be given to the purchasers on November 12, 1965, subject to the leases of tenants, which expire March 1, 1966, and delivery of deeds and payment of the balances of purchase prices shall take place on November 12, 1965. Sellers will furnish abstract showing merchantable title, or, at its option, a title policy of the Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund, Inc., issued in the amount of the selling price, subject to the usual and customary exceptions. The Seller reserves the right to reject any and all bids.
Inquiries may be directed to any of the undersigned.
Dated: September 20, 1965.

NIVEN & CLAY
Attorneys at Law
208 Bank of Pontiac Bldg.
Pontiac, Illinois
Phone: (815) 844-3179

SMITH & SATTER
Attorneys at Law
107 West Water Street
Pontiac, Illinois
Phone: (815) 844-3152

EVENGLOW LODGE, INC.
201 East Washington Street
Pontiac, Illinois
Phone: (815) 844-6131

CARL (SHORTY) RONNOW,
Auctioneer
240 East Payson Street
Pontiac, Illinois
Phone. (Office) (815) 842-1590
(Home) (815) 844-6671

May 5, 1972
Daily Leader
Looking Back to 1957

May 5, 1957

period totaled 1.67 inches.

The Illinois Hotel at Chicago and Washington Streets has been bought for $48,000 by Evenglow Lodge, Inc., for a non-denominational old people's home housing 40 persons. The home is expected to be open for occupancy by fall. The building was erected as the Minerva Hospital by Dr. J. A. Colburne in 1905. The purchase price included the lot to the east on which the corporation hopes to build an addition for the home at some future date. The purchase was made possible by funds from the estate of Mrs. Ada Swords, who died in 1956. About $149,000 of the estimated $160,000 estate was put in trust of L. I. Harris, Pontiac, who was to select a "charitable institution." The purpose of

which is to maintain an old people's home.

October 31, 1973
Daily Leader

Section Two
Daily Leader, Pontiac, Ill. Page 1 Wed., Oct. 31, '73

Evenglow to hold open house to celebrate 15th anniversary

present building to the adjacent





ACTIVE MINDS, ACTIVE BODIES — That is the goal of George Robinson, activity director at Evenglow Lodge. Talent from the community is used for many programs, supplemented by films, talking books, and special programs by area churches. Robinson, who is a former Boy Scout executive, also plans field trips and began an isometric class for the residents. He always is seeking new activities that are educational as well as entertaining. Conferring with Robinson is Mrs. Murray Wallace, field director for Evenglow. — (Leader Photo by S. Kridner.)



NURSING SERVICES PROVIDED — Mrs. Darlene Gardner, R.N., right, and Elaine Schmid, nurse's aide, go over the chart of a patient on the seventh floor Health Center at Evenglow Lodge. The modern nursing center is under the direction of professional nurses 24-hours a day and provided the latest geriatric nursing care. The professional staff is supported by specialists in physical therapy, occupational therapy and social work. — (Leader Photo by S. Kridner.)



GOOD MEALS, GOOD COMPANY — Residents of Evenglow Lodge eat their meals in the bright spacious dining room. Visiting with some of the diners is Mrs. Charles B. Wagner, wife of the late Rev. Charles B. Wagner, administrator from 1960 to 1965. Mrs. Wagner has been employed at Evenglow since 1963 and is editor of the Evenglow Lodge News. — (Leader Photo by S. Kridner.)



DISCUSS EARLY HISTORY — Through the determination of H.E. Vogelsinger Sr., center, community support and later church support was gained for a home for the elderly in Pontiac. Vogelsinger and Myron Heins, left, along with Administrator Donovan Gardner discuss the early history of Evenglow Lodge, celebrating its 15th year since the Evenglow West was opened and 10th year since the new high-rise was built. Vogelsinger is an ex officio board member and Heins is vice president. — (Leader Photo by S. Kridner.)

By SUZANNE KRIDNER
Leader Staff Reporter

Evenglow Lodge is celebrating its 15th year of service and the 10th anniversary of the high-rise building with an open house from 1:30 to 5 p.. Sunday, Nov. 4.

Members of the Board of Trustees will be guides and hosts during the afternoon and a tea will be served in the dining room by the Evenglow Guild.

At 4 p.m., at the First United Methodist Church, a commemorative service will be held recognizing the anniversary gifts that have been given by churches and church organizations within the Central Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The Rev. Clifford Brown, a former trustee and pastor of the Pontiac Methodist Church, will speak at the service. He is now pastor at the Mattoon Methodist Church.

A dinner will be held following the church service for former and present trustees and their families.

The chief instigator in the promotion of a retirement home for Pontiac was H.E. Vogelsinger Sr., who worked on the idea for five years before an option was taken on the former Illinois Hotel and adjoining lot in 1956. The option was taken by Sunset Lodge, Inc., a non-denominational organization formed to establish an old peoples' home in Pontiac.

In June, 1957, the Illinois Conference of the Methodist

Church agreed to back the home in Pontiac Evenglow Lodge Inc. purchased the Illinois Hotel at Chicago and Washington Streets in 1957 for $49,000 to house 40 elderly persons. They moved into Evenglow in 1958.

The building was built as the Minerva Hospital by Dr. J. A. Colburne in 1905. Prior to that date, Billy Sunday, the great evangelist of the early 1900's, had erected a crude wooden-frame building at the corner where great revivals were held and the building was known as "Billy Sunday's Tabernacle." It was torn down in 1905 for the hospital.

The private hospital lasted only a few years and then was sold and opened as a Keely Institute, mainly for the treatment of persons addicted to alcohol, opium and morphine. In order to attract more patients they accepted people

addicted to anything. At one time a woman was under treatment because she ate mothballs.

Dr. L. E. Keeley had established the first Keeley Institute in Dwight. A number of the employes had broken away and started a branch in Pontiac. There was a lawsuit against this branch by the original Keeley establishment, closing the Pontiac branch within a year.

The building was then sold to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Grogan who operated it as the Illinois Hotel for 34 years.

In 1956 the hotel was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Ben Katz of Pekin and continued to be operated as a hotel until it was purchased for Evenglow Lodge. The purchase was made possible by funds from the estate of Mrs. Ada Swords, who died in 1956 and left about $175,000 to establish an old people's home.

The Rev. Lewis D. Hopper was the first administrator and organized a staff and supervised the remodeling of the old Illinois Hotel. The Rev. Charles B. Wagner became the second administrator in 1960, and the Evenglow West building was filled to capacity in 1960.

In 1961, eight ladies were moved from an additional white frame house just east of the

present building to the adjacent top floor of a remodeled building now know as Evenglow North. The white frame house was sold and moved to East Howard Street. An old Pontiac landmark, a blacksmith shop was razed and the property on the corner of Locust and Washington was purchased to make room for the construction of the new seven-story Evenglow East.

Donovan Gardner became director of field work and public relations in December of 1961. Rev. Wagner, Gardner, the officers of the corporation and the Board of Trustees worked in planning the new Evenglow Lodge. Gardner was appointed administrator following the sudden death of Rev. Wagner in 1965.

Evenglow has had more than 400 residents

More than 400 residents have been served by Evenglow Lodge from 1962 to 1972, according to Donovan Gardner, administrator of the home for the elderly celebrating its 15th anniversary of Evenglow West and 10th anniversary of Evenglow East.

In the 10 year period, $2,295,718 was paid out in salaries and $2,153,000 in supplies and materials. Salaries in 1962 were $31,964, compared to 1972's total of $339,199, paid entirely to county or area residents.

The total for supplies in 1962 was $50,000, with the 1972 total more than $200,000.

The 160-165 residents are served by 110 employes, about 70 full-time. Garnder said prospective residents are impressed by two factors, the downtown location and the balconies.

The building, which cost more than $2 million including land and construction, is one of the most attractive in Pontiac. More than $1 million in principal and interest has been paid over the 10 years.

More than just a home provided by Evenglow

Evenglow Lodge, during its 15 year existence in Pontiac, has provided more than just a home for 400 residents through the years.

In 1963, an expanded program was started with the construction of a seven story memorial building and includes Mobile Meals, the Evenglow Forum program, and participation in community projects such as FISH.

The Mobile Meals program is a much needed community service that was started in January of 1969. Volunteers who deliver meals weekdays at noon are provided by the following churchs, First United Methodist, First Christian, St. Mary's, First Baptist, Grace Episcopal and First United Presbyterian. Other volunteers are members of the Pontiac Junior Woman's Club.

All of the food preparation and administrative work is done by the staff at Evenglow Lodge with the assistance of food manager James McAllister.

Administrator Donovan Gardner was one of the originators of the local FISH group and their monthly meetings have been held at Evenglow.

The Evenglow Forum program has extended to many communities in the Central Illinois Conference of the Methodist Church. Through the program, the communities survey the needs of their elderly and provide services so that many of the elderly may continue to live at home.

The Evenglow Guild, only one year old, has more than 200 members who have given more than 1,000 hours of service. Many of the service hours are spent in visiting residents, particularly the shut-ins, assisting with the activities in the 42-bed Health Center, taking residents shopping and doing errands in general. Other sew and mend and outings are planned at the homes of Guild members. Mrs. James McCabe is president of the Guild.

September 27, 1981
Pantagraph

Lodge works toward facility

By JILL GLEASON
Pantagraph staff

PONTIAC — Months of fund-raising and mounds of paperwork face administrator Alexander Weinbender as Evenglow Lodge prepares to build a new medical facility.

The facility, a two-story structure with a basement, is planned to house 70 residents, Weinbender said. Currently, residents requiring intermediate medical care are lodged on the seventh floor of the building.

The new health care center will be connected to the lodge by hallways from the north side, with kitchen facilities to be shared, Weinbendersaid.

The center is expected to cost $3.2 million, Weinbender said. A $1.92 million loan from the Farmers Home Administration will help with part of the financing. Evenglow is responsible for the remaining $1.7 million.

Completion of paperwork for government regulations and securing local fundings are among the conditions Evenglow must meet before receiving the loan, Weinbender said.

He said he hoped to have the money raised "or at least have it in sight" by January so work on the center could begin.

Speaking optimistically, Weinbender said he would like to see construction begin in 1982 with the building ready for occupancy in late 1982 or early 1983.

The center will be the second expansion since the lodge was established in the 1950s.

The idea of apartment-type housing for the elderly was conceived in 1955 by a group of civic leaders, who formed a non-profit corporation called Evenglow Lodge Inc.

The group sought sponsorship from the Illinois Conference of the Methodist Church to provide continuity and support for the organization.

The lodge, which now houses 154 residents, has remained affiliated with the Methodist church under sponsorship from the Central Illinois conference. From the conference, Evenglow receives some annual funding and support from church members.

Evenglow Lodge opened in 1958 when the Illinois Hotel was purchased through a donation from the estate of Ada Swords.

That first building, called Evenglow West, was constructed on the site of Billy Sunday's Tabernacle, known for its sawdust-covered floor.

A $1 million addition built in the early 1960s more than doubled the residential capacity of the lodge and became the tallest building in town.

In 1979, Evenglow made plans to build a health care center like that planned now, but a loan application to FHA was rejected because Pontiac's population, including the prison, was higher than the agency's guidelines for rural areas.

When the guidelines changed, Evenglow again applied, and the loan approval was received Sept. 8.

October 31, 1984
Pantagraph

Health center new chapter in Evenglow story



Pantagraph photo/WANDA LEATHER

Evenglow Lodge has constructed the $3.2 million Tjardes Health Center as a major addition to its plant. The new section will be consecrated Sunday.

By WANDA LEATHER
Pantagraph Pontiac bureau

PONTIAC — What started in a remodeled hotel near downtown Pontiac has turned into a facility that is virtually a community by itself.

And the Evenglow Lodge, a nursing home which opened for business Nov. 7, 1958, will improve its "neighborhood" even more when its 70-bed intermediate health care facility opens this week.

The $3.2 million addition, called the Tjardes Health Center, will be consecrated Sunday at a 2:30 p.m. ceremony. The facility will be open for public tours following the consecration.

The genesis of the retirment community began when Mrs. Ada Swords, who lived on a farm in Livingston County until her retirement, moved into a small house in Pontiac.

She and her husband had no children so they decided that their estate should be used for something of a philanthropic nature to benefit the community of which they were a part.

It was then that she decided to establish a home for older persons in the Pontiac area and she appointed I.W. Harris as trustee to carry out her wishes.

When Mrs. Swords passed away, Harris examined many ideas and plans. He felt that the estate money could best be used if it met a great need and rendered a great service to the community.

Harris, a Methodist layman, and other Methodist church officials met and agreed to use the estate to help establish a retirement home in Pontiac under the auspices of the church.

Pontiac's Illinois Hotel, once a bustling business at the corner of Washington and Chicago streets, had become obsolete and was available. The structure seemed a natural for a retirement home.

The Methodist Church decided to take an option on the property to insure its availability and arrangements were started to establish it as part of the Methodist Church.

At the Central Illinois Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in 1956, the idea for a retirement home was presented as a new agency under the Board of Hospitals and Homes and would be established without any capital involvement from the conference.

Mainly because no capital would be involved, the group accepted the home as one of its agencies and to give it support.

The hotel was purchased and remodeled to allow for 30 residents.

Rev. Lewis Hopper was appointed the first administrator of Evenglow Lodge.

The house next door to the old hotel was also purchased and used for a limited resource program for eight women with a rental fee of $100 per month or the sum of state aid paid at the time.

Hopper retired and was replaced by Dr. Charles Wagner who began to plan the expansion of Evenglow Lodge. Health facilities were needed to give security to the residents.

Every agency of the Central Illinois Conference was asked to prepare a five-year plan outlining needs for addtional facilities and finances.

It was decided that a health facility was definitely needed and plans were considered for a two-story additonal wing which would include a nursing center.

The plan continued to become more ambitious, however, and finally developed into a modern seven-story apartment type dwelling with an infirmary on the top floor.

Also, to the north of Evenglow Lodge was a two-story building which had apartments upstairs and a garage downstairs. The Methodist Church decided to buy this building and make the second floor apartment into rooms for resi-

dents. The first floor area was to be converted into a storage and workshop area and this remodeling was started and completed before construction of the seven-story addition began.

Evenglow Lodge officials received $50,000 from the Collins estate which enabled the home to proceed with its plan for expansion. They retained the services of an architect, Phillips and Swager of Peoria, and hired a field director and public relations man, Donovan Gardner.

The Collins estate became the seed of an expansion program that had its original start from the Swords estate.

As the construction proceeded, founder's gifts brought a total of over $1 million dollars in capital gifts toward the building of the Evenglow addition, which in itself cost nearly $2 million. As the construction neared its end, a $50,000 gift was made by the Hargrave estate.

Upon the death of Dr. Charles Wagner in 1965, Donovan Gardner was appointed administrator. When Gardner resigned in 1980, current administrator Rev. Alexander Weinbender was named, assuming his duties on March 24 of that year.

September 7, 2007
Pantagraph

Open house to mark Evenglow Lodge milestone

By Tony Sapochetti
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PONTIAC — Evenglow Lodge may be a seven-story complex of retirement apartments and amenities, but that's not how Larry Brinkman describes it.

"Living here is kind of like living on a cruise ship," the lodge's director of development said recently as he walked through one of the many living areas. He said the comparison is apt because of all the amenities the lodge offers its 140 residents, such as a craft center, health center and chapel.

Evenglow Lodge, 215 E. Washington St., Pontiac, will celebrate it's 50th anniversary with an open house from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. Sunday. There also will be a private celebration for those who have donated money to the independent living center.

"This is a great opportunity to thank the community for what they have done for us, because we wouldn't be here without them," Brinkman said. "There will definitely be a lot of thank yous."

The lodge got its start from a woman named Ada Swords, who retired to Pontiac with her husband. She decided to leave her estate to establish a retirement home in Pontiac.

The Illinois Hotel was then purchased and remodeled, but it grew with demand into what it is today.

"I just love it here," said Evenglow resident Mary Ellen Peabody.

July 27, 2018
Pantagaph

Woman endows $2.4M to Evenglow Lodge



EVENGLOW LODGE, FOR THE PANTAGRAPH

Evenglow Lodge, 215 E. Washington St. in Pontiac, is the recipient of a $2.4 million donation from a longtime supporter of the facility, the late E. Ruth Harris of Gibson City.

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PONTIAC — When E. Ruth Harris passed away last year, she left a generous gift for Evenglow Lodge in Pontiac.

The Gibson City woman donated $2.4 million from her estate to the faith-based, not-for-profit retirement facility at 215 E Washington St.

"We were thrilled that she would consider us for a gift like that," said Mark Hovren, Evenglow CEO.

The donation was presented in June to the Evenglow board of trustees.

Harris was a longtime donor to the facility after witnessing positive family experiences at Evenglow and her connections through the Methodist faith. Harris was a graduate of the University of Il-

linois and worked for the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

Her husband was George Harris. She died Jan. 9, 2017, at the age of 103.

Hovren said a donation that size likely hasn't been received by Evenglow since the original endowment from Ada Swords of Pontiac in 1957, which helped open the doors of the facility in 1958.

"It's a tremendous gift that will be the catalyst for making Evenglow a great place to live and a great place for future residents," said Hovren.

The money will be used to enhance facilities, programs and services, said Hovren.

Carol Flessner, chair of the board of trustees, said the board is in the process of strategic planning and will use the endowment to identify necessary projects.

"Our buildings are aging. That requires ongoing maintenance which can be very costly. This will help assure that the facilities and programs will be maintained for years to come," said Flessner.

Flessner said officials with Evenglow were "overwhelmed and extremely appreciative" of the donation.

"I think (Harris) knew of the facility's reputation. This is going to be a blessing for Evenglow and the community it serves," she said.

Evenglow provides independent living and assisted living units. The facility is accredited by the United Methodist Association of Health and Welfare Ministries and has received the Seal of Confidence from the Life Services Network of Illinois.